

QUIET CONSERVATIVE MISJUDGED

KELLY LOEFFLER: Flashes of Coverdell

by Eric Tanenblatt



For only the second time in a century, Georgia is represented in the United States Senate by a woman.

Historians will tell you that Georgia's newest senator, businesswoman Kelly Loeffler, arrives in Washington in the footsteps of Rebecca Latimer Felton. She was a women's suffrage activist who symbolically served just one day in 1922. And in the most superficial of measures, they're right: they're both women—indeed, the only women to date—to represent Georgia in the chamber, but the comparisons stop at gender.

In more meaningful measures of temperament and discernment, though, it's not Latimer Felton's reflection I see in Loeffler but another former senator, my mentor Paul Coverdell.

Like Loeffler, Coverdell suffered early doubts about his conservative credentials because then, as now, there was an expectation that conservatism demanded you be the loudest and angriest person in a room.

It might win you fleeting admiration, but a tendency towards melodramatic screeching doesn't make you a conservative. Quite the contrary, Senator Coverdell proved that you needn't raise your voice in anger to advance the conservative cause.

Crucially, the senator also proved that conservatives live in Atlanta just the same as any other corner of the state because geography, like gender, doesn't determine your politics.

It's your politics—the ones you live and breathe, not merely your zip code or posturing for the cameras—that matters. In this regard, Georgia's new senator is a genuine conservative.

Of course, not everyone was so immediately receptive to her appointment. It touched off controversy among Republicans about the soul of the party and its direction.

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Some of the initial shock at the Loeffler pick is understandable: she is, after all, an entirely new and unknown quantity to voters, and her elevation to the Senate comes as the president defends himself against claims he violated his oath of office. Others, still, were upset that the governor had not selected someone with a record of defending the president. But the constitutional role of Georgia's senator is not to defend and protect the president, no matter how much they support his agenda.

Typical of the outrage politics of today, the loudest voices in this debate seemed to know the least— and in most cases, these voices weren't even from Georgia.

Gov. Brian Kemp, who carefully selected Loeffler last year after vetting an enormous field of candidates, understands better than anyone the rising tide of a fast-changing Georgia. The governor was responsible for filling this post— and knew he would be answerable to Georgians for it.

Kemp made his selection because he knows his state and what's right for it, having won statewide more recently than anyone in Washington. Ultimately, he made a choice worthy of both his responsibility and his constituents.



CONGRATULATIONS SENATOR LOEFFLER!

Long before there was a Senate vacancy, Kelly Loeffler was a friend to Georgia 4H. As she recalled her youth as an Illinois 4H'er who grew up on a working farm, we admire the example she sets for past, current and future 4H members and volunteers.



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(Pictured: Gov. and Mrs. Brian Kemp, Sen. Kelly Loeffler and her husband Jeff Sprecher at the August 2019 4H Gala)

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Loeffler will never be the loudest person in the Senate, but she might be the hardest working.

Sure, he saw in Loeffler someone who could re-attract suburban women to an increasingly male party. He might have even seen a hint of his own legacy in naming her. But above all he saw character.

To read this as a transparent Machiavellian bid by the governor to win back the votes of women based purely on gender is to misunderstand the central basis for his pick: Loeffler is someone who will faithfully represent Georgia's interests and values.

Indeed, whereas the Latimer Felton appointment was intentionally designed as a feel-good placeholder, the governor wants Loeffler to remain in office for many years because he knows she's the right person for the right job.

A remarkably accomplished business executive with humble roots, the senator arrives in Washington knowing the tremendous challenges that face Georgia families and businesses— from farms to financial services firms— because she has experienced them herself. Our new senator is a farm girl who tended soybeans and cared for cattle; an athlete who inspires and enables the next generation; and a businesswoman who creates jobs and opportunity.

Loeffler will never be the loudest person in the Senate, and she certainly won't be the angriest. But she might be the hardest working. With small farm conservative values and boardroom pragmatism, our new senator will work to make a Georgia in which everyone, no matter their geography or gender, can succeed.

Anyone tasked with succeeding giants like Johnny Isakson or Paul Coverdell in the Senate would have had big shoes to fill. They may no longer be in the Senate, but they can rest easy knowing their legacies of humble service will survive in Kelly Loeffler.

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